**Editor's Choice**

# Classism, Poverty and the Regulation of Australian Social Work Education

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## ABSTRACT

Given the stated concern of social work with inequality and social justice, it is important to consider if the regulation of social work education aligns with these goals. The impact of the regulatory functions of professional accreditation on the democratisation of social work education is an issue perversely slow to gain recognition. Drawing on a data sub-set from a larger Australian institutional ethnographic study, selected narratives of social work student and academic informants concerning class and poverty are discussed. These narratives reveal how key texts of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) used to regulate social work education influence who can become a social worker, and how the study and work of the informants happens. The extra burden of poverty was documented for some groups of students in social work, particularly when undertaking unpaid placements. Experiences of classism and poverty were found to combine with racism and caring responsibilities to create extra practical, emotional and financial work for some students. While this article reports on an Australian context, the issues raised are relevant for social work education across many parts of the world. I conclude with drawing out implications for social work education, regulation and policy advocacy.

## INTRODUCTION

In line with the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004), the Global Definition of Social Work (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), 2014), and local standards, most schools of social work have a stated commitment to educating students to redress inequality and injustice. However, there has been little research on how these commitments have been implemented. Many professional associations, and government appointed regulatory bodies, representing and regulating social work education have not yet examined how their own regulatory policies and practices may perpetuate, rather than disrupt, inequalities.

Based on a data sub-set from a larger institutional ethnographic study (Hosken, 2017), the aim of this paper is to explore the influence of the regulatory processes on inequality in Australian social work education, focusing on class and poverty. Although the larger study was underpinned by intersectionality, this article foregrounds class inequality for the following reasons. Class inequality (as mediated by other social divisions) is a primary reason for people's contact with social work services (Ferguson, 2011; Sheedy, 2013). Despite the importance of class inequality, an informal scan of Australian social work curricula indicates a general lack of focus on class analysis. Acker (2006) identifies discrimination based on gender, race and disability are no longer legally legitimated in developed capitalist societies; however, this is not true with *class*. Further, foregrounding class is important given social work education occurs in a context of growing income and wealth inequality across the globe (Piketty, 2014).

There are implications of social work education for the demographics of the social work workforce, knowledge generation and the sort of practice carried out in the field. Therefore, the aim of this paper to document any class-based inequalities in social work education is important both for expanding understanding and critique, and for promoting democratic education and practice that is aware of whose class interests social work education serves (Pease, 2010).

The paper is structured as follows. First, social work education is located within national and international literature regarding neoliberalism, class and the higher education institutional context. Second, an examination of the literature situates the aims of this paper among what is known regarding social work education and relations of class and poverty. An overview of the research methodology and design is then provided. Finally, major themes from the data sub-set, and implications for the regulation of social work education are presented.

### The class relations of neoliberalism

Social work education is located in higher education sectors where most countries are responding to neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007). Abramovitz (2012, p. 33) describes neoliberalism as comprising the principles of freedom from constraints to maximise self-interest, competition, accumulation and profit in a market not constrained by state action. This includes the belief that neoliberalism is best served when individualism and market policies are extended to all areas of life, resources, institutions and social, economic and political organisation.

Harvey (2007, p. 42) explicitly addresses the class relations of neoliberalism. He argues neoliberalism was initiated in response to the challenges to "class elites and corporations" from the social movements and unrest of the 1960s and 1970s that questioned relations of inequality. According to Harvey (2007, p. 40), the transnational capitalist class, comprising corporate leaders, collaborated with neoliberal political leaders to establish international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to promote and regulate the relations of class inherent to neoliberalism and capital accumulation. Freeman (2017, p. 3) suggests globalisation has led to "economic de-democratisation" due to the policy-making ability of states being taken up to the supranational level. At this level, there is greater representation of the transnational capital class in economic decision-making alongside a decrease in the influence of the working class.

Traditional understandings of class include a Weberian approach illuminating how members of a class are located within a social structure of inequality with shared common life chances (Acker, 2006). The Weberian description of the layers of class is critiqued for not explaining why class stratification develops or how to change it. In contrast, a Marxian approach identifies class as a relational system of exploitation and domination based in the economy (Acker, 2006). In relational perspectives, classes are delineated by "mutually antagonistic self-interest, that is, the material welfare of one group depends causally on the material deprivations of another" (Prins, Bates, Keyes, & Muntaner, 2015, p. 1354). In more detail, Prins et al. (2015, p. 1354) go on to explain the processes by which the control of productive resources are achieved:

> …social position is not simply a function of the inherited or achieved attributes of individuals but arises from the processes by which certain groups control productive resources by (i) excluding other groups from access to those resources and controlling their labour activities (domination), and by (ii) appropriating the fruits of that labour (exploitation).

Acker (2006) and Abramovitz (2012) use welfare, gender and intersectionality to broaden this Marxian understanding of class, looking beyond the traditional notion of the male worker in the paid workforce able to sell their waged labour to survive. By gendering the understanding of the economy, Acker (2006) and Abramovitz (2012) bring into view those who must be prepared to sell their waged labour, as are people subject to unemployment; those who care for waged workers and the unemployed; and people excluded from paid employment due to age, disability, discrimination and other factors. In this paper, both Weberian and Acker's (2006) intersectional, Marxian, relational understandings of class provide lenses to explore the experiences of informants in higher education, and to analyse if the AASW control of regulatory resources might exclude, or make it harder, for certain groups to become social workers.

Referring to higher education, Rowlands (2016) argues neoliberal policies and practices are facilitated by globalisation in institutional contexts where the transnational capitalist class influence supranational bodies such as the IMF, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These organisations have "pressed governments to shift public policy from social good to deregulation, competition and priv-atisation" (Rowlands, 2017, p. 97). This institutional context has implications for exploring

how the regulation of social work education might be complicit in reproducing the relations of class inequality reflected in organisational "inequality regimes" (Acker, 2006, p. 10). An inequality regime is explained by Acker (2006, p. 10) as being "the configuration of inequality-producing practices and processes within particular organisations at particular times."

Social work education occurs in an Australian higher education sector stratified along class lines (Moodie & Wheelahan, 2009). At the bottom of the class pyramid are vocational technical and further education (TAFE) organisations where working-class and second-chance learners have strong representation at the certificate levels. At the top are the elite, sandstone universities, the Group of Eight (Go8), comprising Australia's leading research universities. Although recognising the diversity of lived experiences and degrees of permeability, the educational hierarchy is noted for its role in the reproduction of the relations of class including standardising the rules of the established social order (Smith, 2005). It is possible the class-based stratification of the Australian higher education sector may filter the impacts of the AASW re-accreditation policies. These impacts might vary according to the particular demographic mix of the student cohort curated according to the status and wealth of the university in which the social work course is located.

Several studies (James, Karmel, & Bexley, 2013; Koshy, 2016) have shown the transition from elite to mass education in Australia may have provided benefits to some of those in federal government identified *equity* categories. However, relative to total numbers, these same studies report there were no significant changes in comparative representation, and thus no real change in relations of class inequality.

The widening participation agendas have focused on the achievement of targets, including increasing the representation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This has led to a strong research agenda investigating the impacts of class, as one form of inequality, on higher education and students (for example, Pearce, Down, & Moore, 2008; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010; Twomey & Boyd, 2016).

**Class and the regulation of social work education**
In contrast to the solid research program addressing inequality and class in the general higher education sector, there is a paucity of similar research focused on class in social work education. Little research uses intersectionality or foregrounds class analysis to examine inequalities in relation to who can access and complete the required educational courses to become a social worker. There is even less research examining the implications of the current demographic of the social work profession regarding the achievement of the stated goals of social justice and redressing inequalities.

Previous studies have reported the impacts of neoliberal inequalities on the organisational and institutional context of social work practice (see for example, McDonald, 2006). Morley and Ablett (2017) report on social work's response in liberal-capitalist societies to deepening and pervasive inequalities due to economic privatisation and social deregulation.

A small body of scholarship has examined social work, class and social work education or social work practice more generally. For example, Strier (2009) presented a theoretical

framework for defining "class-competence" in social work practice. Pease (2010, p. 70) identified a lack of class analysis in social work education and questioned "whose class interests are served by arguing that class no longer exists." Ferguson (2011) argued the continued importance of class and the trade union movement for social work in the 21st century. Dahle (2012) explored the history of gender and class in the social work profession in Norway. Strier, Feldman, and Shdaimah (2012) discussed how the representation of social class in introductory textbooks exposed how the concept was understood in social work education. Drawing on Pease's work, Hosken (2016) outlined a poverty-aware and class-cognisant (PACC) approach to teaching and doing critical social work.

McNabb (2017) examines international and local standards of social work education arguing that, while they are a potential force for change in democratising and decolonising social work education, they could be stronger. There is a small body of recent literature reporting on the impact of regulatory functions of accreditation on student experiences of poverty in Australian social work education (Ryan, Barnes, & McAuliffe, 2011; Brough, Correa-Velez, Crane, Johnstone, & Marston, 2015; Agllias, Howard, Cliff, Dodds, & Field, 2016; Gair & Baglow, 2017; Hemy, Boddy, Chee, & Sauvage, 2016; James Cook University (JCU) & AASW, 2016). Of particular concern to social workers, JCU and the AASW (2016) report on a study of 2,320 social work students in Australia from 19 universities. They found the percentage of social work students who had to regularly go without food or other necessities because they could not afford them was 32.2%. This prevalence of poverty for social work students was almost double that found in a general cohort of tertiary students (Bexley, Daroesman, Arkoudis, & James, 2013, cited in JCU & AASW, 2016, p. 3). The AASW (2012a) requirement in the *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards* (ASWEAS) that social work students complete 1,000 hours of unpaid field placements has been found to exacerbate student poverty (Brough et. al., 2015).

Building on these works, the concern to locate and change any regulatory policies and practices serving to exclude or make it harder for some groups of people to become social workers based on class and poverty is the focus of this paper.

## METHODOLOGY

### Institutional ethnography

The feminist, sociological method of institutional ethnography, pioneered by Dorothy E. Smith (2005), framed the research to map connections between the lived experiences of informants to any policies and practices that implicate class in social work education. Although institutional ethnography commences inquiry from studying the situated experiences and work practices of individuals, people are not the objects of analyses. Rather, the accounts of how their work happens provide entry points into the suite of institutional relations an institutional ethnographer aims to make visible.

Three core tasks define institutional ethnography as a research strategy (Smith, 2005). First is an assessment of how institutional processes, such as regulation and accreditation, might shape how the everyday work of people happens. Work is defined in a broad sense as "anything that is done by people that requires time and effort" (Smith, 2005, p. 151), thus

inclusive of the study work of students and the hidden work needed to do the work that is counted. Second, is an analysis of how organisational and institutional work processes are made accountable through value and belief systems. Informant narratives of their work were analysed to locate texts prescribing organisational work processes, such as re-accreditation and regulation. Narratives and texts were then examined to understand how accreditation and regulation may assume any normative, standardised codes. Next, the data were assessed to understand what the work of informants involved in being a social work student and social work lecturer as they navigated the normative standards in the regulatory policies and procedures. The third task involves identifying how these work processes in one area connect to those performed by others elsewhere and together form an extended set of social relations.

**Ethics, sampling, data production and analysis**
Ethical approval was obtained from the university Research Ethics Committee on 20 July 2011. Informants confirmed their approval for transcription and use of the data produced.

Sampling in institutional ethnography is of an institutional process, rather than a population, and, therefore, can commence from one or more informants (Smith, 2005). The three key informants in the larger study were selected for their representation of varied social locations including class, gender, race, ethnicity, and status and position. This paper draws on data revealing the institutional processes of the AASW that impact on the regulation of class and poverty, as traced from two key informants' accounts. Analysis of transcribed, mutual, ethnographic, face-to-face interview conversations held between the researcher and two of the three key informants were chosen as they included accounts of the experiences of social work students. The transcribed interviews were tagged with the first letter of the interviewee's pseudonym name, the number of the interview and the year in which the interview occurred. This identifier is placed in brackets following the excerpts from informant narratives included in this paper. Interviews were based on an open-ended interview guide developed by the researcher in collaboration with informants addressing lines of inquiry exploring the research questions. Where data are drawn from informants' study and work in universities these are de-identified into a pseudonym composite called "Reach University" (RU). The informants have pseudonyms. Denalh is a South Sudanese Australian female social work student; and Audre is a white-Euro Australian, female, social work lecturer from a working-class background.

*Two levels of data*
This article draws on a sub-set produced over five years from 2011 to 2016, as informants studied and worked at public universities, and in human service organisations providing social work placements for students. Institutional ethnography requires two levels of data be collected, produced and analysed (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). The first level of data comprises informant accounts explaining what the work is of a social work student and social work lecturer in Australian public universities. The second level of data, produced from analysis of the informant accounts of their work (transcripts of narratives), identifies what policies or regulations organised and activated this work to happen how it did. Attention is paid to understanding the textual process of the work. This includes how informants activated the texts and understood the way the texts were taken up at different stages and sites within the focus organisations. The transcripts and located organising

texts were then analysed for organisational and institutional process and social relations, and embedded standardised codes. The analysis located what people, documents, policies, regulations, systems and/or practices link the local and broader organisational and institutional settings. Groupings were used to code the transcripts, texts and literature in the NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software package) around "work, talk, texts, people and institutions" (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 143).

Establishing such textual connections explicated the relations between people in these settings. These are the power relations between people, the "relations that rule" (Smith, 2005). Ruling relations identifies the institutional complexes coordinating the everyday work of administration and the lives of those subject to administrative regimes.

*Rigour*

Rigour in institutional ethnography entails two core criteria. First, is if the quality of the description of informant experiences provide the reader with a genuine depiction of what it is like to work in those areas (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). The believability of the analytical account of how people's everyday knowledge and work is tied to larger norms is the second aspect of rigour. This includes informants, and others using similar methodologies, finding plausibility in the connections made to the social and political relations of ruling (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

## RESULTS

In order to be a *professional* social worker in Australia, the AASW requires a person to hold a social work qualification from a course accredited by them. The AASW (2012a) regulates social work education courses setting out the principles, practice standards, code of ethics, core curriculum, graduate attributes, and criteria for the accreditation and re-accreditation of a professional social work program. The key text used in the accreditation and re-accreditation of social work courses is the AASW (2012a) *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards* (hereafter referred to as the *ASWEAS*); and six associated guidelines. The AASW (2010) *Code of Ethics* (hereafter referred to as the *Code)* is referenced as needing to be read alongside the *ASWEAS*. These key texts refer to social justice and redressing inequality being at the core of social work.

The following narratives are drawn from many in the data revealing how the regulatory regime of the AASW is a significant influence on who can access social work education. These particular narratives were chosen as they also reveal how social locations influence how much work students must do to complete their degree.

In the following narrative, the lecturer informant describes her observations and feedback from a bachelor of social work student group attending a full-day seminar whilst on placement.

> **Narrative One: Audre**
> The first session in the integration seminar was a small group "debrief discussion" for students on placement … The seminar group was diverse: mature-aged; sole-parents; TAFE pathway students; younger students in shared rental houses; regional and country

students; most still doing paid work while on placement … a small number of younger students living with and supported by their parents … Consistent themes reported back from the groups were: being exhausted, the cumulative impact of being on full or part-time placement alongside decreasing funds; often poverty for the students and for many, their families ... not being able to pay bills, being late with their rent, reducing their food bills, and pawning items to get emergency funds … Students also talked about the stress of not being able to take sick leave or carer's leave without having to make up that time at the end of placement … Transport, clothing and childcare had been more expensive than they planned … The students living and supported by parents reported far lower stress levels as they had financial, emotional and practical support, and did not need to undertake paid work alongside their placement … Some students from working-class areas in our local community, asked if the AASW just wanted social work students from wealthy families who had gone to elite schools … and shared their anger and frustration at the rules. I loathe having to produce our field education documents to comply with aspects of AASW regulations … Passing professional accreditation is needed to attract students to an accredited course. (A5.8, A5.9, 2015)

In the narrative above, the informant's sense of being disheartened relates to the degree of complicity, subjugation and subordination required to meet professional re-accreditation. The narrative also exposes impacts on students of a key text organising and coordinating the work of the lecturer and students relating to student placements. The *ASWEAS* (AASW, 2012b, p. 3) *Guideline 1.2.3 Guidance on field education programs* specifies the structure of placements, requiring that students "must successfully complete a minimum of 1,000 hours in at least two field education subjects … No leave of any kind may be included in this requirement." In the narrative above, the lecturer informant recounts the majority of students without the financial, emotional and practical support of living with parents, reporting the exhaustion, poverty and stress caused by not being able to take leave while on placement without extending the placement. These students had to do extra work in addition to placement including part-time paid work to survive, paying for childcare, and doing the transport of children to and from childcare, and care for children before and after the day at placement. These students also had to do additional work compared to the students who lived at home with financial support to manage their stress about these additional practical and emotional tasks. Importantly, there was additional work for these students without financial support and with caring responsibilities to manage their disillusionment and anger during their placement day resulting from misrecognition where the regulations governing placement were not made for their situation. Working-class students questioned the class elitism inherent in such rules.

Compulsory on-campus attendance requirements for social work students studying on-line were reinstated in 2012 (AASW, 2012a). In Narrative Two below, the informant refers to the negative impact of the compulsory 20 days of attendance on certain groups of students.

### Narrative Two: Audre
The requirement in ASWEAS that students must attend a minimum of 20 days face-to-face teaching will preclude many of those in our traditional cohort. I raised this issue at the ASWEAS review consultation. A senior AASW representative told me if people

cannot afford to undertake the course, they probably should not study. I was shocked at how easily this AASW representative said those words – without embarrassment. By her dress, language, age and demeanour, I do not imagine she had to struggle financially, go to a state school, or to a TAFE as her pathway to university. I shudder to think about her being a social worker with poor people. It is as if she blames people for being poor and not easily able to undertake university study. Having completed secondary schooling at a TAFE myself, I know what it is like to feel second rate, but also to get a second chance. I feel angry on behalf of myself and others not allocated the advantages that wealth and private schooling can provide in accessing and succeeding in university education. The wealthy do not even seem to realise they get such an easier road. (A6.3, 2015)

The informant is confronted, and angry, hearing what she perceives as classist stereotypes from the AASW representative. This may be indicative of a reported predominant, middle-class, often paternalistic and charitable, orientation of the mainstream social work profession (Huppatz, 2010; Mendes, 2005; Peel, 2011). Some suggest professional social work in Australia is underpinned by a middle-class, expert-led confidence, particularly associated with individual, psychological-oriented counselling work (Huppatz, 2010; Mendes, 2005; Peel, 2011). Others assert this more conservative stream has dominated the development of mainstream professional social work as represented by the AASW (Mendes, 2005; Morle, Macfarlane, & Ablett, 2014).

The informant judges that middle-class people, as she perceives the AASW representative to be, would not be as well suited to work with people from working-class and poverty back-grounds as the working-class and poor themselves. This view has some support in research. When compared to corporate leaders, working-class contexts are reported to involve a greater sense of social engagement, interdependence and social connection (Kraus & Stephens, 2012, p. 643); high empathic accuracy (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010); adaptive agency; communal styles of helping; different conceptions of morality; higher ethical standards; greater attention to context (Côté, 2011); and higher levels of generosity (Piff, Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010).

In the next narrative, Denalh describes some of her experiences studying under-graduate social work as a person in poverty, with caring responsibilities, from a South Sudanese refugee background.

### Narrative Three: Denalh
I am pleased my TAFE course, and my being a South Sudanese refugee background person, helped me get into the university … I am determined to finish my course and help my community. However, I cannot apply for leave from placement every time I must care for sick children, or when we must mourn a death or attend community business. I asked the university to change these rules. They say they are trying but the AASW is not responding. I cannot afford the time or money in petrol and fees to go the doctor to get a medical certificate … I am too scared to use public transport as people assume we are Muslim because we are black. After the news keeps talking about terrorism and radical Muslims, people stare at us … some people have yelled abuse at us, this scares my children

and me too much ... so I must drive and maintain a car. I cannot afford to extend the placement – why don't we get leave like the workers at the placement agency? I do not understand. I asked my supervisor at my placement organisation not to tell the AASW if I need to leave early to pick up my children or attend a community meeting … Sometimes, I have not had enough money for food for school lunches. I thought Australia would want me to get an education so I can get a good job. I thought social work would be much more understanding and flexible about these things. Isn't social work about human rights? The rules about placement and parts of the AASW *Code of Ethics* are only for white people with money and resources. I had thought about doing placement just two days per week, but it still requires two weeks of full-time. How is setting up placements so only young people, with no children, and with money from their parents can easily complete them about human rights? I wish there were more black people and others without money at the university – in charge of the university and the AASW. (D16, 2015)

In the narrative above, the informant describes needing flexibility in attendance at her place-ment organisation to manage her experiences of poverty as combined with caring for children, fear of racial and religious harassment and collectivist cultural responsibilities. The presence of the coordinating, standardising and disciplinary function of the *ASWEAS* is revealed in the student informant's requests to the university to change the AASW rules, and to the placement field educator to not comply with the AASW regulations governing placement. In considering the three narratives above against the regulations, the standardisation of dominant norms within the *ASWEAS* regulations becomes apparent. Only certain groups of people can fully, or more easily, satisfy the requirements of placement as the regulations reflect and perpetuate their encoded image. The image is of those groups of people with the financial and cultural capital resources of the middle class to afford to undertake unpaid placements without the need to engage in part-time paid work to survive, without dependants or other caring responsibilities (or with money to pay others to provide care), who are white-Euro, non-Muslim, Australians.

The earlier suggestion of a standardised dominant norm underpinning the *ASWEAS* is strengthened when considering the experiences of Denalh against an examination of another AASW placement regulation. The AASW (2012b, p. 3) provide *Guidelines for considering extenuating circumstances* in deciding on exemptions from the "requirement that placements that are two days per week must include at least two full-time (five-day) block periods." The AASW's one example of a circumstance which *may* be considered extenuating is contained to health, being a "serious health issue, illness or disability." The description of circumstances *not* considered extenuating is more extensive, including "other work commitments, family commitments; holidays/moving house; changing jobs; financial cost; and transitory health matters" (AASW, 2012a, pp. 3–4). Examination of this section indicates the presumption of a standardised norm of who can become a *professional* social worker. These notions of acceptability and unacceptability of extenuating circumstances are problematic when con-sidering the experiences reported by informants in this research. Visibly different, ethnic minority, refugee background peoples, like Denalh, are disproportionality subject to poverty (Correa-Velez, Spaaij, & Upham, 2013), higher rates of unemployment (Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009), discrimination including racial aggressions (being yelled abuse at)

and micro-aggressions (being stared at) (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2009). A substantial body of research documents living with poverty and racism causes greater numbers of incidents of ill health, homelessness and precarious employment (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015); and the need for low-income social work students to maintain paid work alongside placements, and difficulties in affording the additional transport, food, clothing and other costs associated with unpaid placements (Brough et al., 2015; Gair & Baglow, 2017). The fact that these situations, coalescing around class, poverty, race and religion, are those specifically identified in the *ASWEAS* above as not constituting "extenuating circum-stances" exposes the dominant normative underpinnings of the regulations.

## DISCUSSION

The AASW sets standards for, and regulates, Australian social work education. There is a general lack of attention by the AASW to poverty, wealth inequality and class as reflected in the limited focus on these issues in the specified core curriculum content in the *ASWEAS* (2012a). This contrasts with other key texts of the AASW such as the *Code of Ethics* (2010, p. 13) obligating social workers and the profession to work to alleviate the hardships of people to obtain economic, social and cultural human rights. There are three broad discourses in the key regulatory texts of the AASW – narratives of regulation, professionalism and social justice, which interact with each other, and with other related discourses. Data in this study indicate, in practice, the regulatory and professionalism discourses dominate. This is consistent with the wider context of regulation, audit, and disciplinary activity of the institutional contexts of social work and higher education sectors within neoliberal Australia, shaped within the discourses and policies of global organisations such as the IMF, the OECD and the World Bank.

The narratives and textual analysis identify the disproportionately negative impact of section 6.8 of the *ASWEAS* on students with limited incomes and those from minority cultural back-ground collectivist cultures. This reveals this section of the *ASWEAS* requires standards only a middle-classed, white-Euro student can fully, or more easily, satisfy. This is a form of individualism and classism, understood as the oppression of peoples from backgrounds involving low incomes and collectivism "through a network of everyday practices, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and institutional rules" (Bullock, 1999, p. 2059).

The data document the previously invisibilised extra work the South Sudanese Australian social work student informant, and other students in the narratives, had to perform to meet the specifications set by a predominantly white-Euro settler social work professional body (Bennett, 2015), the AASW, in the *ASWEAS*. The embedding of middle-class, white, individualistic, professional values, discourses and practices in the regulatory texts of the AASW created misrecognition for the low-income and non-white students due to their class, race, and gender status. This required those students to work harder than others to achieve the same or similar results and put significant barriers in their way.

What does a regulatory body, such as the AASW gain by maintaining policies excluding, or making it harder for working-class and other marginalised groups to access or succeed at social work studies? Theorists such as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) might suggest

the AASW is consciously, or subconsciously, replicating its predominantly white-Euro, settler, middle-class history, protecting its symbolic and material capital and interests through boundary marking (such as the exclusionary accreditation and reaccreditation practices delineated earlier). Further research would be useful to examine what social work demographics and whose class interests the AASW predominantly serves.

## LIMITATIONS

I do not pretend that the findings at the local level discussed in this paper are representative of the larger populations. The researcher's purpose in institutional ethnography is not to generalise about the people's experiences from where the research starts, but rather to locate and describe social processes that have standardising and generalising effects. Through joining descriptive ethnographic accounts of people's everyday work with a critical analysis of the social, organisational and institutional relations that give shape to those embodied experiences, institutional ethnography aims to make relations of ruling visible and, therefore, more open to critique and reform (Smith, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

The data in this Project add to the evidence about the poverty that many social work students experience (AASW & JCU, 2016) and the negative impact of the AASW (2012a) *ASWEAS* requirements exacerbating the poverty of social work students (Brough et al., 2015). Further, the relations of class (as shaped by race, gender and caring status) were found to permeate the regulatory texts of the AASW producing inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) in the schools of social work they regulate. The experiences of informants and construction of acceptable and unacceptable extenuating circumstances indicate the normalisation of unequal relations of classism in the texts and organisational and institutional context of the AASW. The study documented this, and other examples, of "civilised oppression" (Harvey, cited in Pease, 2010, p. 12) where privilege and oppression are "normalised in everyday life… embedded in cultural norms and bureaucratic institutions [where] many of these practices are habituated and unconscious."

The AASW has significant power to set the priorities for social work education and the profession in Australia via accreditation. This affects all social work students and social workers, including the majority who are not members of the AASW, and social work service users. The professional association could address class-based inequality, and model social justice and human rights-based regulation and accreditation policies and practices.

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